

Networks of support: Civil society's role in integrating international students in Japan and Australia

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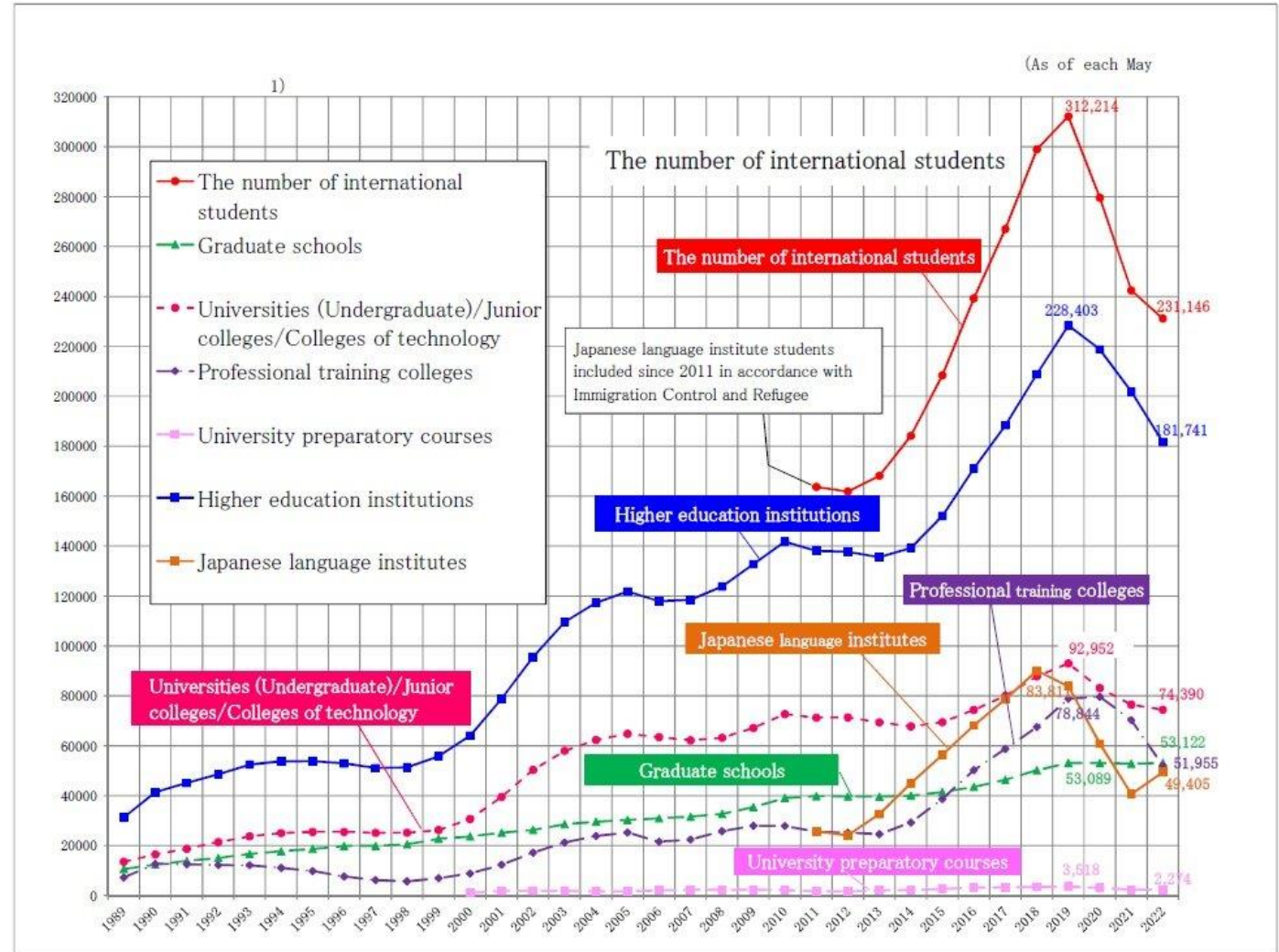
CGHE Seminar 357, 18 May 2023

Content

- International students and their support organisations in Japan and Australia
- Co-creating social capital in Japan
- Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international students and their support organisations in both countries
- New forms of activism & advocacy

International Students in Japan

- Sharp increase since 2010
- Peak in 2019 (312,214 exceeding the 300,000 International Student Plan (2008-2020)
- Decline by 10.4% on average (279,597 in May 2020 vs. 312,214 in 2019)
- Continued decrease in 2021 (242,444 in May 2021)
- First signs of recovery in 2022



Research Gaps

- Internationalisation of HE in Japan is criticised for its excessive focus on numbers instead of support (Rakhshandehroo & Yamamoto, 2017)
- Demographic crisis (ageing & shrinking population) -> labour shortages -> policies to attract more “highly-skilled foreign professionals” (METI, 2018, 2019) “including overseas students studying in Japan” (METI, 2019) to Japanese companies
- Japanese society as distrustful of strangers and newcomers (Robertson, 1991; Nakano, 2005; Taniguchi, 2013)
- Social capital as “connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise among them” (Putnam, 2000)
- Lack of agreement among scholars whether social capital can be generated in the short term (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993; Fukuyama, 2001; Soubeyran & Weber, 2002; Ellison et al., 2007)
- Also debatable: impact of diversity on social capital level, aka “constrict claim” (Putnam, 2007)
- Social capital generation in the short term in diverse groups (criteria, factors, obstacles)

Study 1: Japan

Research Question: Can social capital be generated in the short term in diverse groups?

Examining interactions between international students and civil society groups

Theoretical framework: social capital theory

Broad definition of civil society: “organised, nonstate, nonmarket sector” (Pekkanen, 2006, p. 3).

Phases of Data Collection

1) Pre-pandemic (2017-2018; follow-up in 2019)

- 30 civil society organisations in Western Japan (Kansai area: Osaka-Kyoto-Kobe)
- Participant observation + interviews + textual analysis of event promotion materials

2) During the pandemic (Nov-Dec.2020, Dec.2021-March 2022)

- 22 students enrolled at Japanese universities (on-site & remote) from China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Iran, Chile, US, UK, Italy, France, Sweden, Egypt
- Digital ethnography: online event observation + online interviewing + analysing social media & websites

Study 2: Japan and Australia

Research Question: how did international student support organisations (ISSOs) respond to the COVID-19 crisis?

Conceptual framework: human security of international students (Marginson et al., 2010)

Data Collection

Participant observation + interviews + analysis of event promotion materials, websites, social media posts

1) Australia (Oct.-Nov. 2019 online, Feb.2020 on-site, online for the rest of 2020)

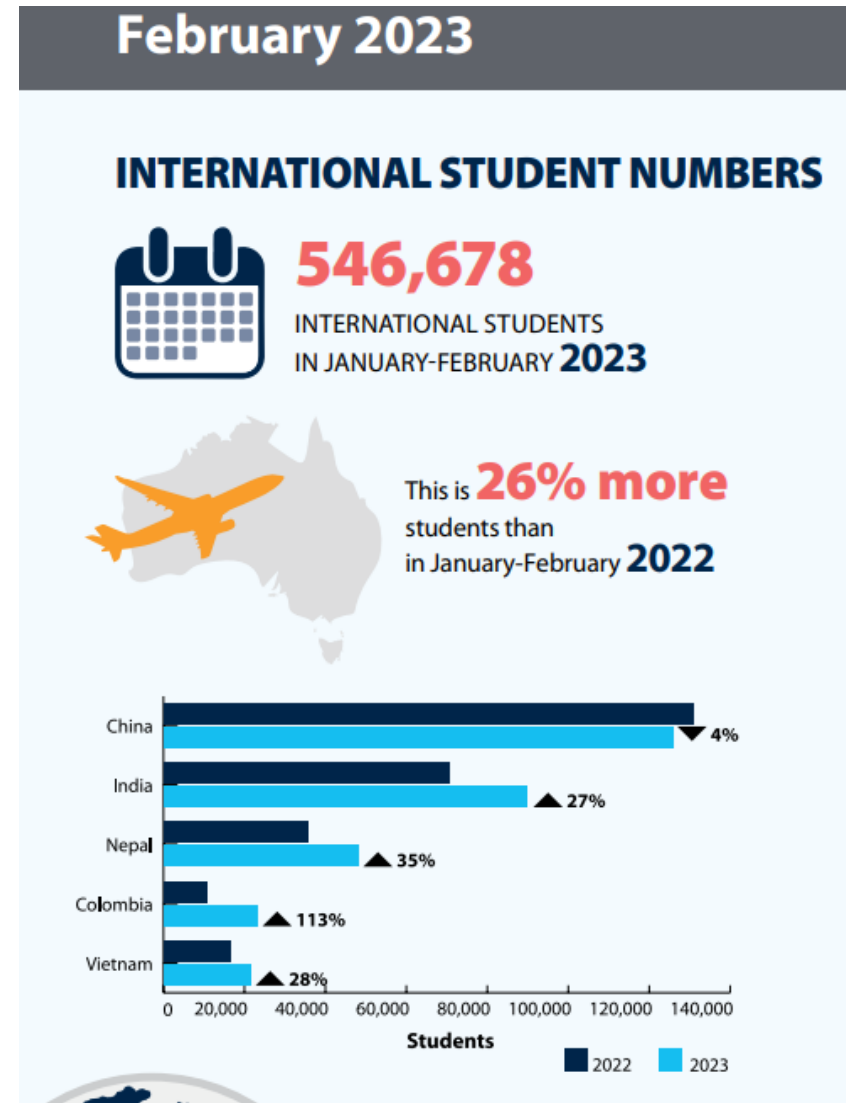
- 30 non-profits, charities and volunteer groups in New South Wales

2) Japan (Nov-Dec.2020, Dec.2021-March 2022, both online & in person)

- 30 local non-profits in the Kansai area + 3 in Tokyo + 2 in Fukuoka

International Students in Australia

- Decline in international enrolments by 17% in 2020-2021 (512,855 in March 2021 vs. 952,271 in 2019)
- Estimated 500,000 international students stranded overseas in 2020 (Salmi, 2020)
- Recovery in Jan.-Feb. 2023



On-campus Groups

JAPAN	AUSTRALIA
Peer support groups for international students	Peer support groups for international students
University circles/clubs	Student societies
Alumni networks (current students & graduates, domestic & international)	Alumni networks for graduates (not for current students)
Ethnic associations on campus	Ethnic-based groups on campus
	Student collectives
	Branches of political parties and religious groups

Off-campus Groups



AUSTRALIA

JAPAN

Self-organised coordinating agency on the national level (CISA)	N/A
N/A	Groups affiliated to local governments
N/A	Groups affiliated to the central government
Ethnic associations at the city level and national level	Ethnic associations at the city level
Charities (legal, job-hunting, sexual health, loneliness, religious-based)	NPOs
N/A in this sample	Grassroots
Informal hobby groups	Informal hobby groups

Functional Differences

Australia

- Political parties and religious groups are represented on campus
- Advocacy groups (“collectives”)
- Emphasis on social activities (pizza parties, movie nights, coffee hour, walking tours)
- Free food/drink as inducement to join

Japan

- No political and religious groups on campus (few exceptions of religious universities, e.g., Buddhist or Christian)
- Difficult topics are avoided; focus on entertaining
- Offer cultural activities, esp. traditional culture (tea ceremony, calligraphy)
- Emphasis on cultural differences, not similarities



Pre-Pandemic Interaction

- Forms of the interaction: cultural exchange events, Japanese language classes, providing daily life information, job-hunting support, volunteering, self-organisation among international students
- Reliance on face-to-face communication (cooking, eating, drinking)
- Most organisations apolitical, exception: 1 organisation achieved a policy change at the university level

Criteria of social capital

1. exchange of information and resources: 24 groups out of 30
2. mutual help: 18 groups out of 30
3. developing shared norms within a group: 10 out of 30
4. forming friendships and new connections: 24 groups out of 30
5. creating new networks within existing networks/groups: 4 out of 30
6. returning participants/return rate: 7 groups
7. staying in touch with the organisation: 12 groups

Best practices, or factors conducive to social capital

- intentionality of creating ties
- programmes/event series instead of one-time events
- value congruence among members and/or adequate mitigation (intercultural training)
- consistency in the organisational behaviour
- flexibility of the organisation's schedule and relaxed practices
- offering room for international students' initiatives (e.g., their involvement in event planning and decision-making)
- international students' active membership/leadership
- having a common goal to pursue
- intrinsic interest in the activity
- effective coordination among the actors

Obstacles: pressure to volunteer, mismatch of motivations among the actors, international students' temporary stay in Japan, absence of a coordinating agency supporting international students like CISA in Australia

Study 2: Impact of the Pandemic on International Students

- **Social life and relationships** (loneliness and isolation, esp. newcomers; getting into an abusive relationship)
- **Studies** (particularly for those stranded overseas: perception of lagging behind, poor internet/library access; decreased quality of online classes, inability to do fieldwork/attend conferences)
- **Physical and mental health** (increased stress, anxiety, insomnia, depression)
- **Finances and career planning** (loss of part-time jobs; eligibility for scholarships; inability to find a job for those studying online from abroad)
- **Perceived unfairness** (only interviewees from Australian unis)

Japanese ISSOs' Adjustments & Failures to Adjust

- In-person events became impossible in 2020
- Uni clubs & circles stopped recruiting new members
- Many groups founded by local governments went silent for months
- “[Our members] think it's essential to meet directly and share same experiences. I feel quite strong hesitations against online meetings like Zoom. We will have to figure out how to survive this era” (ISSO leader, Osaka, February 2021).
- On-campus peer support groups & MEXT-sponsored groups turned to Zoom and social media
- Informal groups in a hybrid mode: in-person meetings outdoors with social distancing + online options (Line, Zoom, Discord, Facebook Live)



Students' Response to the Online Format

- Some unsatisfied or unwilling to participate: “I don't want to participate in Zoom events because I don't get the point. If it's just on Zoom, there is no share for me, there are no real interactions. Because the online wall is too thick” (French/Kyoto, November 2020).
- “I think it [Zoom] takes away the impact that you would have otherwise in person. There's this natural hesitance to speak up or interact; it feels a bit stiffer, obviously more distant, of course. [...] It almost has the feeling of being in a class setting” (American/Kyoto, November 2020).
- Complaints about shortage of certain types of events, e.g., those organized by their graduate school to introduce new students to their peers (Indian/remote, January 2021).

Response in Australia

- Australian organisations adapted much faster, switching to virtual events during the first lockdown in 2020
- Provided a wide range of events, often connected with the COVID-19 emergency

Examples

- online conference on sexual health (CISA, June 2020)
- webinar “COVID-19 and Your Visa” (Redfern Legal Centre, October 15, 2020)
- SEXtember festival in a hybrid/blended mode, i.e., partly on campus with social distancing, September 14-25, 2020, Student Representative Council (SRC) at the University of New South Wales (UNSW).
- online forum (CISA, December 18, 2020) “to raise the voice of and for offshore international students who are currently stranded outside of Australia” (CISA, December 23, 2020).

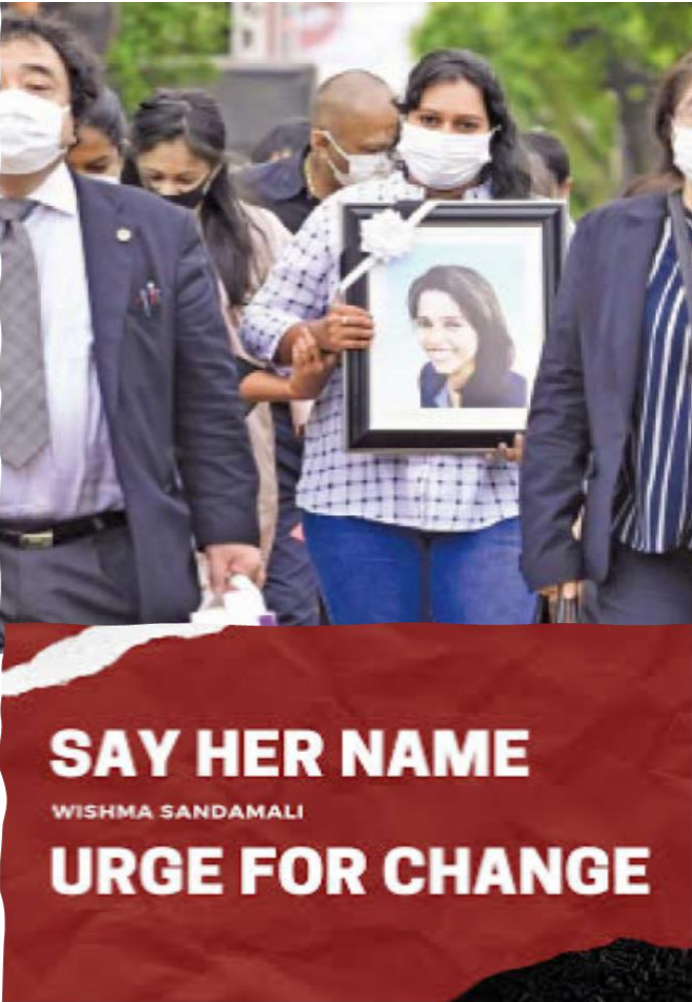


Political Parties' Involvement

- **AUS:** Socialist Alliance & Resistance University Sydney
- Travel ban as a racist response (5,900 signatures on the petition)
- In-person event at the University of Sydney in February 2020
- Social Equality Party (SEP) & International Youth Students for Social Equality (IYSSE): online event in May 2020
- **JPN:** Government debate on financial aid to foreign residents (incl. students & trainees) in spring 2020
- Nonprofits in Japan posted online updates of the debate



Local Political Activism & Transnationalism in Japan



Wishma Sandamali's protests, 25.09.2021, Mainichi



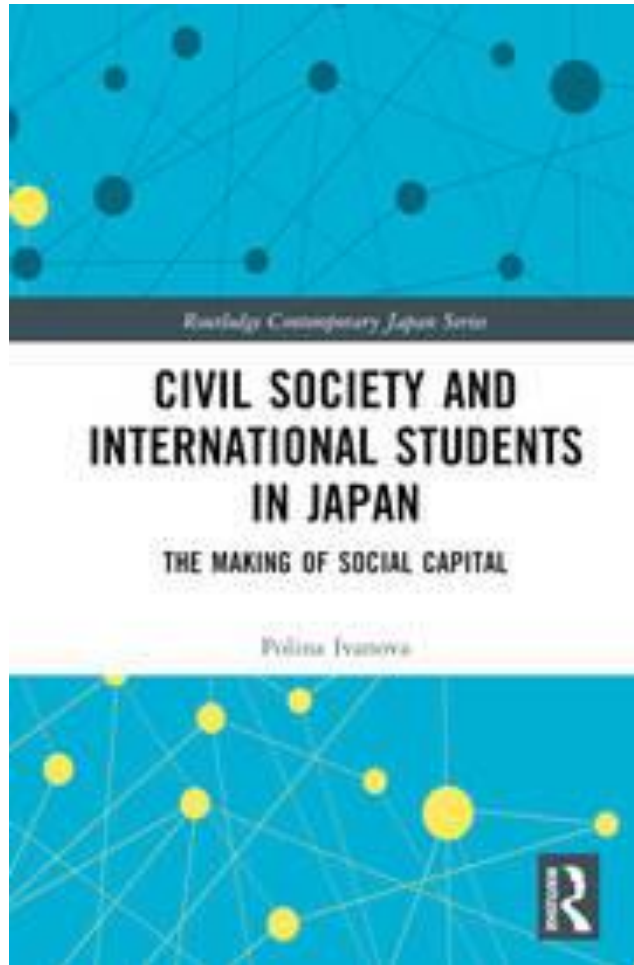
BLM march in Kyoto, 21.06.2021, Japan Times

Advocacy for Students Stranded Overseas



Photo: #allentriesarethesame/Go! Go! Nihon

- Series of events in support of international students stranded overseas by CISA
- Feb.2022: est.147,000 international students with issued visas waiting to enter Japan
- campaign on Twitter #educationisnottourism, Return to Japan Support Group on Facebook, articles on NHK, Asahi Shinbun
- Official name: Open the borders to safe study in Japan Association
- Members are Japanese language schools -> presenting IS in Japan as language learners
- “He (*Davide Rossi*) and his campaign is the only reason that I started to feel okay with my situation” (Indian/remote, October 2021)



Forthcoming in July 2023

- Introduction
- Chapter 1. Theories of civil society and social capital
- Chapter 2. International students and their support groups in Japan
- Chapter 3. Expectations and disillusionment in interactions between international students and civil society organisations (CSOs)
- Chapter 4. International students and their support groups during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Chapter 5 Can social capital be generated in the short term?
- Conclusion

Conclusion

- Role of alternative actors in the international student support
- International students and civil society can co-create social capital in the short term in diverse groups
- The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing challenges and created new ones
- Students in Australia may have been experiencing commercialisation and dehumanisation to a greater degree; “othering” appears stronger in Japan (Tran et al., 2022)
- International students stranded overseas for months & years
- Australian organisations adapted much faster; many Japanese groups could not adapt to the “new normal” & remained paralysed
- Some displayed unusual political activism; new organisations & new forms of civic engagement
- Students proactively searched for solutions outside their universities and usual support groups -> transnational activism

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